

2023 Strength Of Schedule

How To Maximize Value Of This Knowledge In Your Drafts

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Every fantasy manager knows that strength of schedule is important when it comes to gauging fantasy player value, as it is a metric that can help convert a middling fantasy prospect into a solid starter, turn a quality starter into an impact prospect or have the opposite effect in both areas when the schedule is a hindrance.

To get maximum value out of this powerful draft factor, let's do a full analysis of how favorable or unfavorable matchups are likely to impact player value during the 2023 fantasy season.

Methods

The strength of schedule (SOS) rankings are based on several factors, many of which will be covered in the player position sections. These attributes are then weighed and adjusted to a 1-100 scale, with 100 being the most favorable. To make the grades easier to navigate, the numbers have also been color-coded, with low numbers in red, mid-tier numbers in yellow, and high numbers in green.

Many fantasy managers subscribe to the idea that early season schedule strength has greater importance because those weeks are less likely to be impacted by the uncertainty that comes with in-season injuries. This mindset resulted in the schedule grades being divided into five sections: Weeks 1-5, Weeks 6-9, Weeks 10-13, Weeks 14-17, and Weeks 18. Week 18 is bypassed in the final two sections because most fantasy leagues won't be active for Week 18.

To highlight how the system works, let's use the Kansas City quarterback SOS as an example.

Team	Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9	Weeks 10-13	Weeks 14-17	Weeks 1-17
Kansas City	57	58	20	51	57

In Weeks 1-5, the Chiefs have a 57 score, which signifies that Patrick Mahomes will start the year with a schedule score that is just a bit above average. The outlook for Mahomes is similar throughout much of the rest of the year, as he has SOS scores of 58 and 51 in Weeks 6-9 and Weeks 14-17, respectively, but he has a tougher schedule in Weeks 10-13 due to the 20 score in that span. Put this entire season together and Mahomes ends up with a respectable 57 SOS score.

Best practices for using strength of schedule grades

When reviewing which fantasy players have the best and worst schedules, fantasy managers should keep these three elements in mind:

1. **Pay the bulk of your attention to the highest and lowest scores.** There is some viable value in comparing players

with scores ranging from 25-75, but the optimal approach is to downgrade players with SOS scores lower than 25 and upgrade players with SOS grades of 75 or higher.

2. **Consider SOS grades to have a positional impact limit of one tier.** There may be a few exceptions to this, but generally speaking, a plus or minus schedule shouldn't adjust a player's grade up or down more than one tier. For instance, an RB3 candidate can see his value increase to the RB2 tier if he has a highly favorable SOS grade or can see his value drop to the RB4 tier due to a very negative SOS grade, but SOS scores typically don't wield enough power to alter that RB3's rankings to the RB1 or RB5 tier.
3. **The primary use of SOS should be as a tiebreaker.** Fantasy managers who are reviewing two relatively equal prospects can lean on SOS as a helpful tie-breaking tool to make that pick decision. Before doing so, do note it takes at least a 25-point difference in SOS points to consider this metric an effective tiebreaker.

It should be noted that schedule strength grades change during the year, often by a significant margin. To address this, I provide comprehensive season-long strength of schedule updates for my Paydirt Silver and Gold subscribers. These adjustments help fantasy managers adjust their in-season roster strategies based in part on the changing schedule landscape.

Now let's review how SOS grades impact the five primary fantasy football positions.

Quarterbacks

Highlights

Derek Carr has only been a QB1 once in his career, ranking 10th in 2016, but the schedule may give him a shot at returning to that level in 2023, as the Saints' field general has the most favorable schedule overall and the top schedule in Weeks 1-5.

Quarterbacks SOS Table					
Team	Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9	Weeks 10-13	Weeks 14-17	Weeks 1-17
Arizona	20	72	51	13	20
Atlanta	85	15	1	88	85
Baltimore	54	58	26	63	54
Buffalo	26	43	1	38	26
Carolina	63	1	63	69	63
Chicago	88	72	63	63	63
Cincinnati	54	58	57	75	54
Cleveland	38	58	57	38	38
Dallas	35	58	63	51	35
Denver	41	58	57	69	41
Detroit	57	29	57	57	57
Green Bay	94	43	69	100	94
Houston	78	15	69	63	78
Indianapolis	81	72	51	57	81
Jacksonville	51	1	51	75	51
Kansas City	57	58	20	51	57
Las Vegas	57	58	1	75	57
L.A. Chargers	44	72	51	63	44
L.A. Rams	20	58	20	44	20
Miami	26	72	1	20	26
Minnesota	63	58	32	57	63
New England	26	43	32	63	26
New Orleans	100	29	51	88	100
N.Y. Giants	1	43	1	44	1
N.Y. Jets	29	58	57	38	29
Philadelphia	23	43	20	32	23
Pittsburgh	41	29	44	44	41
San Francisco	44	72	69	38	44
Seattle	41	100	32	63	41
Tampa Bay	69	58	81	69	69
Tennessee	54	29	100	26	54
Washington	16	58	32	1	16

Atlanta and Green Bay have superb bookend scores with upper-tier rankings in Weeks 1-5 and Weeks 14-17. That leads to two of the top scores in this category and suggests that Desmond Ridder and Jordan Love could have hidden value as depth QBs, but be aware that the Falcons also have a very unfavorable schedule in between those peaks.

Justin Fields has an 88 overall SOS score, and his schedule segment scores never drop below 63, so he has a schedule consistency that is rare among upper tier QB1 candidates.

Lowlights

Daniel Jones has the lowest matchup points total among quarterbacks for the season, but what makes that even worse is that he also has the lowest score in Weeks 1-5 and Weeks 10-13. Add it up and it's a reason to potentially avoid him as a low-tier QB1 candidate.

Kyler Murray doesn't weigh in quite as badly as Jones in this category, but his 20 SOS points mark is tied for third lowest among quarterbacks for the entire season, and he has 20 and 13 scores, respectively, in Weeks 1-5 and Weeks 14-17.

Fireworks points

One additional metric used to grade fantasy quarterbacks is fireworks points. This statistic gauges the likelihood that a team will get into a larger than average volume of high-scoring games (defined as contests where each team scores 24-plus points). This metric is utilized in grading every fantasy football player, but it has a greater impact on quarterback grades due to their principal role in high scoring games.

The Chiefs are the only team with a perfect 100 score in this category headed into the 2023 season. It's just another reason to justify ranking Patrick Mahomes at the top of the QB charts.

Six teams are tied for second here with an 89 score, a list that includes Chicago, Dallas, Denver, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington. That potential production spike adds value to Justin Fields, Dak Prescott, Russell Wilson, and Geno Smith as possible start candidates and helps Trey Lance, Brock Purdy, or Sam Howell as depth candidates.

New Orleans and Atlanta bring up the rear in this metric with a 1 score in fireworks points, which is a factor in downgrading Derek Carr or Desmond Ridder. Jacksonville and Tennessee claim the other two spots in the bottom four, which hurts the cases of Trevor Lawrence, Ryan Tannehill or Will Levis.

Running backs

Highlights

The 100 matchup points that the Chicago Bears have in rush defense SOS score for the season should vault Justin Fields' ranking at the quarterback position and will also assist Khalil Herbert, D'Onta Foreman, and Roschon Johnson to varying extents.

Four other teams claim a 90-plus score in rush defense matchup points: Detroit and Minnesota (both with 95 points) along with Denver and Green Bay (92 points). This increases

Running Backs SOS Table					
Team	Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9	Weeks 10-13	Weeks 14-17	Weeks 1-17
Arizona	54	80	51	28	45
Atlanta	100	51	30	73	78
Baltimore	72	85	63	37	73
Buffalo	58	65	30	51	37
Carolina	86	55	55	73	86
Chicago	72	85	55	87	100
Cincinnati	43	16	38	37	1
Cleveland	1	60	22	82	7
Dallas	40	55	84	51	59
Denver	68	55	67	87	92
Detroit	86	21	100	69	95
Green Bay	86	41	71	78	92
Houston	33	41	55	37	15
Indianapolis	47	85	5	37	15
Jacksonville	58	21	34	55	20
Kansas City	86	85	46	19	64
Las Vegas	61	100	30	73	73
L.A. Chargers	29	75	51	37	29
L.A. Rams	54	60	63	51	56
Miami	58	46	30	15	7
Minnesota	75	80	51	87	95
New England	51	41	63	19	26
New Orleans	51	100	51	73	81
N.Y. Giants	54	41	13	69	20
N.Y. Jets	29	75	38	82	48
Philadelphia	47	55	1	82	26
Pittsburgh	54	26	84	51	51
San Francisco	58	60	71	51	62
Seattle	72	60	34	1	18
Tampa Bay	54	80	26	73	56
Tennessee	86	1	59	100	73
Washington	58	60	79	10	45

the upside potential for Jahmyr Gibbs, David Montgomery, Javonte Williams, Alexander Mattison, Aaron Jones and AJ Dillon.

Every NFC North team also has fairly favorable rush defense SOS score throughout the season segments, so these running backs have positive schedule consistency cases as well.

Closing out the notable schedule boosts here are Carolina (86 points) and New Orleans (81 points). These much better than average marks make Miles Sanders a potential RB2 upside play and indicates sneaky upside potential for Alvin Kamara and Jamaal Williams.

Lowlights

There are six teams with a season-long rush defense SOS total below 20. Cincinnati rates last, as the Bengals have an overall rush defense SOS score of 1 and no score above 50 in any of the weekly sections.

Cleveland and Miami are tied for second lowest with a score of 7. The Browns have an up and down schedule, with a 1 SOS score in Weeks 1-5 and a 22 score in Weeks 10-13, but the Browns do close the year with an SOS 82 score, so there is a silver lining. Miami's schedule is a slalom, as it starts with a 58 score and continually gets lower, closing out with a 15 score in Weeks 14-17. This indicates fantasy managers may want to reconsider relying on Dolphins RBs as depth candidates.

Houston, Indianapolis, and Seattle close out the sub-20 scorers in this category.

Other items of note

Bijan Robinson heads into training camp as a potential top-5 RB candidate and Atlanta starts the year with a 100 SOS rush defense score in Weeks 1-5, so the opening schedule adds to Robinson's RB1 case.

Derrick Henry also has a great starting score, with an 86 mark in Weeks 1-5, and the Titans have a 100 score in Weeks 14-17, but their 1 score in Weeks 6-9 is a middle of the season concern.

Wide receivers

Highlights

Derek Carr isn't the only Saints' passing game player to benefit from a favorable pass coverage schedule, as the New Orleans' wide receiving corps has a 100 score for the entire 2023 campaign, as well as a 97 score in Weeks 1-5 and a 98 score in Weeks 14-17.

It may be tough to trust Green Bay pass catchers with the unproven Jordan Love under center, but fantasy managers can take solace in knowing that the Packers' wideouts have a 90 pass coverage SOS score. That may make Christian Watson or Romeo Doubs viable upside plays at various points of fantasy drafts.

Wide Receivers SOS Table					
Team	Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9	Weeks 10-13	Weeks 14-17	Weeks 1-17
Arizona	14	43	79	19	6
Atlanta	82	100	10	93	73
Baltimore	29	76	4	72	13
Buffalo	45	73	1	57	6
Carolina	91	19	64	92	70
Chicago	76	82	53	67	73
Cincinnati	41	16	69	93	45
Cleveland	1	64	64	47	18
Dallas	29	19	79	59	27
Denver	26	31	58	72	28
Detroit	91	31	67	57	57
Green Bay	79	37	76	100	90
Houston	88	55	58	37	47
Indianapolis	64	79	51	70	63
Jacksonville	76	40	39	67	39
Kansas City	57	55	27	54	26
Las Vegas	67	79	8	82	46
L.A. Chargers	29	22	62	67	23
L.A. Rams	29	58	22	64	9
Miami	67	79	13	19	6
Minnesota	82	73	32	54	47
New England	1	64	37	77	19
New Orleans	97	76	51	98	100
N.Y. Giants	29	43	20	65	1
N.Y. Jets	48	19	74	47	24
Philadelphia	100	16	30	57	24
Pittsburgh	17	49	39	59	8
San Francisco	60	1	84	59	36
Seattle	41	22	46	62	14
Tampa Bay	23	76	72	92	70
Tennessee	29	34	100	52	45
Washington	51	79	50	1	16

Philadelphia, Carolina, and Detroit wide receivers can be added to list of early season upside plays, as they have SOS scores of 91 or higher in Weeks 1-5. The Panthers also have a 92 score in Weeks 14-17, something that may make Adam Thielen and DJ Chark good fantasy playoff starters.

Lowlights

The Giants' wide receiving corps won't be drawing much attention during fantasy drafts for many reasons, and fantasy managers can also add an unfavorable schedule to that list, as New York sports a 1 score in this season-long measure of this category.

Five other teams come into this season with a single-digit SOS ranking in wide receiver coverage, as Arizona, Buffalo, and Miami have a 6 score here, while Pittsburgh has an 8 score and the Rams have a 9 score. There are plenty of quality wideouts on those clubs, including Stefon Diggs, Cooper Kupp, Tyreek Hill, and Dontae Johnson, but every one of those players will likely lose a SOS tie-breaking battle with a similarly rated wide receiver on draft day.

Other items of note

Fantasy managers aiming for SOS consistency at this position may want to look at Tampa Bay's pass catchers, as the Bucs have 72-plus SOS scores for three of the four season segments and have a 70 overall score in this category. It's the type of thing that can make Mike Evans and Chris Godwin

good roster picks even with the downgrade at quarterback from Tom Brady to Baker Mayfield.

Tight ends

Highlights

Green Bay, Houston, and New Orleans are the three teams with 90-plus season long SOS scores for tight ends, but the reality is that Dalton Schultz is likely to be the only fantasy tight end roster addition among that group to benefit from this, as he is the sole starter-caliber candidate among tight ends on those squads.

For those looking to use this metric as a tiebreaker among the upper-tier tight ends, note that Travis Kelce (70) and Mark Andrews (83) have very similar scores, while T.J. Hockenson (51) falls a step behind them in this category.

Lowlights

Only two tight ends come into the 2023 campaign with an SOS score of lower than 20. Darren Waller is the primary concern here, as he may be the most talented pass catcher on the Giants' roster, but he has a 1 SOS score and thus is going to be challenged to compete with the second tier TE1 contenders. Zach Ertz is the other TE with an SOS score of less than 20, and when that is added to what is likely to be a split target situation with Trey McBride, it makes it tough to suggest drafting Ertz.

Other items of note

Tight Ends SOS Table					
Team	Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9	Weeks 10-13	Weeks 14-17	Weeks 1-17
Arizona	10	38	56	6	12
Atlanta	78	78	9	76	70
Baltimore	51	100	33	86	83
Buffalo	64	67	29	48	54
Carolina	96	27	60	62	68
Chicago	73	49	64	95	85
Cincinnati	73	12	52	86	58
Cleveland	64	52	68	25	56
Dallas	37	38	52	86	54
Denver	28	19	17	100	30
Detroit	73	38	17	48	37
Green Bay	64	49	92	100	98
Houston	96	41	96	76	100
Indianapolis	73	52	72	91	89
Jacksonville	37	30	41	67	37
Kansas City	78	93	21	48	70
Las Vegas	73	56	29	76	64
L.A. Chargers	87	1	45	81	51
L.A. Rams	60	38	41	15	30
Miami	73	56	1	25	28
Minnesota	100	19	21	72	51
New England	19	38	41	81	39
New Orleans	100	38	68	95	92
N.Y. Giants	60	5	1	29	1
N.Y. Jets	42	38	60	29	39
Philadelphia	78	12	5	58	26
Pittsburgh	1	67	41	72	45
San Francisco	69	30	100	48	71
Seattle	73	38	5	86	47
Tampa Bay	19	45	64	62	47
Tennessee	46	38	100	43	64
Washington	60	56	56	1	41

There is a plus for Hockenson, as he has a 100 SOS score in Weeks 1-5, so fantasy managers looking for an early season TE scoring spike may want to add draft day value to Hockenson.

Defense/special teams

There are three elements that make up the D/ST SOS rankings:

Pass blocking points. This metric reviews which teams have the best/worst pass blocking schedules. This highlights value very effectively because sacks usually account for more than 50 percent of overall D/ST value. Pass rushing talents generate much of that sack value, but an abundance or lack of pass blocking skill can be even more important, which is why this metric has primary value in the D/ST SOS measurement.

Interception points. There are gunslingers and game managers at the quarterback position, and the gunslingers are the ones who are more likely to throw interceptions. This metric measures the risk-taking levels of those opposing passers to help determine how likely it is that a D/ST will compile a large number of interceptions.

D/ST fireworks points. This is the flip side of the offensive fireworks points measurement, as it improves D/ST value when the matchups are against opponents with low-powered offenses and lowers D/ST value in contests against high-powered offenses.

Highlights

Defense/Special Teams SOS Table					
Team	Weeks 1-5	Weeks 6-9	Weeks 10-13	Weeks 14-17	Weeks 1-17
Arizona	46	52	100	20	75
Atlanta	18	100	34	100	92
Baltimore	79	52	4	32	17
Buffalo	55	62	37	1	18
Carolina	34	76	73	51	84
Chicago	71	42	10	20	1
Cincinnati	50	21	49	58	34
Cleveland	38	66	76	66	92
Dallas	42	25	88	5	28
Denver	100	1	40	1	1
Detroit	51	28	61	55	48
Green Bay	59	52	16	58	34
Houston	67	49	28	92	73
Indianapolis	67	35	55	69	70
Jacksonville	75	76	70	35	97
Kansas City	5	73	22	32	1
Las Vegas	50	62	22	32	23
L.A. Chargers	34	46	28	66	29
L.A. Rams	38	49	16	85	37
Miami	46	35	58	55	48
Minnesota	1	83	61	16	32
New England	26	76	49	47	53
New Orleans	83	90	19	81	100
N.Y. Giants	10	80	43	58	48
N.Y. Jets	10	21	58	85	34
Philadelphia	83	76	1	35	40
Pittsburgh	26	49	28	69	28
San Francisco	55	8	25	62	7
Seattle	21	21	64	66	34
Tampa Bay	18	59	88	51	73
Tennessee	38	56	58	89	84
Washington	42	73	49	35	53

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Team	Pass blocking points	Team	Interception points
Arizona	100	Arizona	67
Atlanta	18	Atlanta	100
Baltimore	34	Baltimore	1
Buffalo	1	Buffalo	34
Carolina	34	Carolina	100
Chicago	1	Chicago	34
Cincinnati	34	Cincinnati	34
Cleveland	84	Cleveland	67
Dallas	67	Dallas	12
Denver	1	Denver	34
Detroit	34	Detroit	89
Green Bay	34	Green Bay	34
Houston	51	Houston	56
Indianapolis	34	Indianapolis	45
Jacksonville	51	Jacksonville	89
Kansas City	34	Kansas City	1
Las Vegas	34	Las Vegas	23
L.A. Chargers	34	L.A. Chargers	45
L.A. Rams	51	L.A. Rams	45
Miami	51	Miami	56
Minnesota	34	Minnesota	56
New England	51	New England	45
New Orleans	51	New Orleans	67
N.Y. Giants	34	N.Y. Giants	89
N.Y. Jets	51	N.Y. Jets	34
Philadelphia	18	Philadelphia	89
Pittsburgh	51	Pittsburgh	12
San Francisco	18	San Francisco	23
Seattle	67	Seattle	34
Tampa Bay	67	Tampa Bay	89
Tennessee	34	Tennessee	67
Washington	100	Washington	45

Team	Fireworks points	Team	Fireworks points
Arizona	34	Arizona	67
Atlanta	100	Atlanta	1
Baltimore	23	Baltimore	78
Buffalo	34	Buffalo	67
Carolina	78	Carolina	23
Chicago	12	Chicago	89
Cincinnati	34	Cincinnati	67
Cleveland	67	Cleveland	34
Dallas	12	Dallas	89
Denver	12	Denver	89
Detroit	34	Detroit	67
Green Bay	34	Green Bay	67
Houston	67	Houston	34
Indianapolis	78	Indianapolis	23
Jacksonville	89	Jacksonville	12
Kansas City	1	Kansas City	100
Las Vegas	23	Las Vegas	78
L.A. Chargers	23	L.A. Chargers	78
L.A. Rams	23	L.A. Rams	78
Miami	34	Miami	67
Minnesota	23	Minnesota	78
New England	45	New England	56
New Orleans	100	New Orleans	1
N.Y. Giants	34	N.Y. Giants	67
N.Y. Jets	23	N.Y. Jets	78
Philadelphia	34	Philadelphia	67
Pittsburgh	23	Pittsburgh	78
San Francisco	12	San Francisco	89
Seattle	12	Seattle	89
Tampa Bay	45	Tampa Bay	56
Tennessee	89	Tennessee	12
Washington	12	Washington	89

The Saints' D/ST is a winner here on two levels, as New Orleans has the best D/ST SOS score for the 2023 season and has 81 scores in three of the four weekly sections. The Saints will generally be considered a borderline D/ST1 in most draft rooms, but this hugely favorable schedule slate makes New Orleans a potential late-round upside value pick.

Arizona and Washington both have the league lead in terms of favorable pass blocking matchups, as the Cardinals and Commanders each have 100 scores in this metric. Cleveland is the only other club to tally an 80-plus score here, as the Browns registered an 84 pass-blocking points score.

Atlanta and Carolina get the most assistance from the interception points category, as they lead the league with 100 scores there, but five clubs (Detroit, Jacksonville, NY Giants, Philadelphia, and Tampa Bay) aren't far behind with 89 scores.

The Falcons also get a boost from the D/ST fireworks points category, being tied with New Orleans for the top spot at 100 points and is part of why Atlanta ended up with a 92 overall D/ST SOS score. The Falcons aren't a draftable D/ST for a variety of reasons, but they should be on the early season watch list as a club that could be a quality D/ST spot starter.

Lowlights

The San Francisco 49ers have one of the strongest cases for the top D/ST spot, but the schedule points total isn't an

element leaning in that direction, as the 49ers have a 7 D/ST SOS score.

The two other D/STs with starter-caliber ratings that suffer in the D/ST SOS metric are Denver and Kansas City, as they are tied for last place here with a score of 1. Denver also has a 1 score in D/ST SOS in Weeks 6-9 and Weeks 14-17, so the Broncos are a tough sell as a consistent point scorer at this position.

Part of Denver's schedule woes come in the pass blocking points category, as the Broncos are tied with Buffalo for last there with a 1 score. Kansas City's bottom of the barrel ranking in SOS points is due in part to a 1 score in interception points, as the Chiefs are tied with Baltimore for last in that metric.

The Chiefs also suffer from placing last in D/ST fireworks points, as no other club ranks as low as Kansas City in that category. It's tough to see that changing since the Chiefs D/ST plays opposite a Kansas City offense that might be the highest-powered platoon in the NFL.

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